

wonderful poetic paradigm of the biblical "The sins of the parents are visited upon the children." And what a remarkable use of that aphorism as a *point de départ* for a poetic statement on seeking a national healing.

Whitfield has grasped (and used as the dynamic of her work) the essentially ambivalent nature of guilt: denied, it neutralises, confronted, it imposes its own solution. It is not conscience confronted but conscience abrogated that doth make cowards of us all.

When one considers Agnès Whitfield's work, it is tempting to become caught up in the question of context and to lose sight of what, happily, the poet never permits herself to forget: here is poetry, poetry first and last. *Ô cher Émile je t'aime* is a work which derives its integrity as well as its importance and usefulness from that fact. We have earlier alluded to the startling originality of its images. The poet invites her reader, as well, to indulge in some sprightly intellectual word play: the *amertume*, the verbal *présent décomposé*, the *mon cor anglais*, the ambiguity of the *pelouse/pelure*. Even more delightful to the ear are the inchoate rhymes (*rôle/Émile*), the chiasmic rhymes (*...est passé/sans laisser de trace*), the unexpected ruptured morphologies and syntaxe. Here syntaxe, as in all good poetry, is the handmaid, not the master.

I find many fine features to these too-short pages, many mental delights, much playfulness cheek-by-jowl with a vigorous honesty and a poised sense of seriousness, a poetic ambiance that recalls Saint-Jean Perse or Valéry. What perhaps appeals most to me personally is the paradoxical lucidity of the work's very complexity. The varied pattern and vigour of its images, its unrelenting sensual richness and daring syntactic commitment never shortcircuit the forward movement of theme. A closer and more subtle analysis than mine of its structure will, I am sure, reveal an architectonics fully commensurate with its *poesis*. *Ô cher Émile je t'aime* reveals a maturity of thought, a naturalness of poetic instinct and a surety of technique one meets too infrequently in many of our more seasoned poets.

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